Series of the Roerich Centre of Art and Culture, Allahabad

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ART AND MEDITATION

AN INTRODUCTION
AND
TWELVE ABSTRACT PAINTINGS



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To enjoy works of art means to rediscover visions of our own soul.

(A. B. G.)

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"Nothing is more hallowing than the union of kindred spirits in art. At the moment of meeting, the art lover transcends himself. At once he is and is not. He catches a glimpse of Infinity, but words cannot voice his delight, for the eye has no tongue. Freed from the fetters of matter, his spirit moves in the rhythm of things. It is thus that art becomes akin to religion and ennobles mankind."

(Okakura Kakuzo)

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FOREWORD

The following essays have come into existence during and after an exhibition of my paintings at Allahabad which was held under the auspices of the Roerich Centre of Art and Culture. I first felt rather reluctant to include my meditation pictures in an exhibition which was meant for a general public, unaccustomed to abstract art of this nature. But to my surprise I found that just these abstract paintings formed the main attraction of this exhibition. Again and again I was asked about my conception of abstract art in its relationship to meditation, and the cultural background in which my work had developed. In response to these questions which, as I felt, were the expression of a genuine interest of the public, I delivered some informal lectures. But it is due to the encouragement of Mr. R. C. Tandan of the Hindustani Academy that I have ventured to condense these lectures for publication. I am conscious of my shortcomings in expressing such delicate matters and subtle experiences in words. I therefore must request the reader to take the result of my efforts as a mere hint towards something which he may experience himself if he tries to follow the indicated direction with patience and sympathy.—A. B. G.

"Gopal Ashram," Almora (*Himalaya*), May, 1936

First Part

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF MEDITATION & ART

THE WELL OF LIFE

In our innermost being there is an incessant going and coming of forms and sounds, visions and voices. It reverberates with unheard melodies and with the voices of beings born and unborn. It is the meeting place of the whole world. But it is great only if it is open and ready to accept the world and to give it up at the same time.

It is not immutability that makes our soul great, but its faculty of transformation which enables us to resound with the tunes of all spheres of the universe. The rivers of life unite in the deep and hidden well of our being and flow through it.

The wise one knows how to listen to those melodies, how to watch those visions, how to feel those vibrations, and how to be carried by the great streams into the infinite.

In order to hear he must be silent, in order to see he must close his eyes to the external forms, in order to feel the cosmic rhythm he must arrest his breath and master his heart,—and in order to be carried by the eternal streams he must give up his selfish desires. The creative artist will realize his visions in his works of art, the holy one in his life.

All of us could be creative if we would think less of the doings and achievements of our everyday life, of our personality, and if we thought more of those hidden forces and faculties within ourselves. We make programmes with our brain instead of using the

ever present forces of our heart. We cheat ourselves with our coarse plans and trivial aims. We do not see what is next to us, we do not hear the whispering voices of our heart because of the noise of our own words. Our eyes are blinded by the glaring colours of daylight. Our restless life takes away our breath, our insatiable desires make our heart palpitate and cause our blood to rage through the veins. Thus we do not hear the sound of other spheres, do not see the great visions, do not feel the mysterious vibrations,—and the eternal streams flow past us into the infinite whence they came.

Fortunate for us, there arise from time to time Great Ones who shake us up from our lethargy by their noble example, who free us of our vain activities by their profound wisdom, who inspire us by the sublime beauty of their works, and who open our eyes to the realities within and without ourselves.

Then again we become aware that the deepest mysteries are manifested in this our physical world and revealed before our very eyes even in the material forms of things, if only we have found the centre of our inner world and drunken from the eternal source within us.

The hidden way, that leads down to this source, is the path of meditation and absorption, and the vessel in which the water of life is brought up to the surface is art. The vessel may have many shapes : that of words, that of songs, that of colours, or that of material forms.

Those who remain at the source are wise; those who return again to the world in order to distribute the precious elixir are the creative minds; but those who themselves become the vessels and give themselves to the world are the All-compassionate Ones, the Deliverers of humanity, the Enlightened Ones.

PARALLELISM BETWEEN ART AND MEDITATION

Art and meditation are creative states of the human mind, both are nourished by the same source, but it may seem that they are moving in different directions: art towards the realm of sense-impressions, meditation towards the overcoming of forms and sense-impressions. But this difference pertains only to accidentals, not to the essentials.

First of all meditation does not mean pure abstraction or negation of form—except in its ultimate illimitable stages—it means the perfect concentration of mind and the elimination of all unessential features of the subject in question until we are fully conscious of it by experiencing reality in a particular aspect or from a particular angle of vision.

Art proceeds in a similar way: while using the forms of the external world, it never tries to imitate nature but to reveal a higher reality by omitting all accidentals, thus raising the visible form to the value of a symbol, expressing a direct experience of life.

The same experience may be gained by the process of meditation. But instead of creating a formal (objectively existing) expression, it leaves a subjective impression, thus acting as a forming agent on the character or the consciousness of the meditator.

The highest form of meditation or perfect absorption, which has no particular subject, may be described as the attainment of a spiritual vacuum in which the

universal forces of our soul can manifest themselves. In this sense it can be called the art to arouse within ourselves a creative attitude, a state of intuition.

The artist, on the other hand, who has the gift, or who by continuous training has achieved the faculty of expressing such intuitive experience, crystallizes his inner vision into visible forms by reversing the meditative process into a process of materialisation. But this presupposes that the artist first has attained that intuitive state. This may happen either by external stimuli or it may be conditioned spontaneously by the genius of the artist or by spiritual training. In many cases all these factors may work together: the beauty of nature or the impression of a human face, or an illuminating thought may act as a stimulus by which the dormant genius is aroused, and by conscious concentration on this intuition the experience takes visible shape and finally materializes in the creation of a work of art.

Thus art does not move exclusively in the opposite direction of meditation, as it might have appeared to a superficial observer who would see art only in its formal expression, but it moves in the direction of meditation as well, namely in the state of conception. Art and meditation compensate and penetrate each other.

The importance of art and its relationship to meditation is not yet exhausted with the aspect of its original creation. The effect of a work of art, the experience to which it leads the beholder, is equally important. The artist himself may not care for the effect of his work. For him the process of creating is the only thing that really matters. But art as a factor in the life of humanity and part of human civilisation is mainly concerned with its faculty of inspiring ever again those who open themselves to the influence of great works of art.

The enjoyment of art is an act of re-creation, or rather of creation in the reverse direction, towards the source of intuition, i.e., an act of absorption, in which we lose our small self in the creative experience of a greater universe.

"Thus art means the ever renewed concentric attack and the breaking through of selfhood towards infinity, the complete extinction of limitation by endless and as such uninterrupted turns of radiations and inhalations; it means the condensation of the universe to a microcosmic focus and ever again the establishment of a magic balance between soul and universe. The object of art is the condensation of all the inconceivable streams, forces, and effects of the universe upon the plane of human understanding and experience; it is the projection of psychic emotion into the infinite.

The self dissolved and transformed into the whole,—in which case emptiness only signifies the complete non-resistance,—means the dissolution of the one into the other, the passionless acceptance of the world into the liberated, i.e., unlimited soul. Silent stillness, or intuitive vision: revelation! Ever again concentrated in the perfection of human equanimity intensified by the complete readiness of the medium, infinity is attained; and from the bondage of the symbol,—as the artistic expression of the unexpressible,—this infinity reacts into the freedom of the soul." (K. With)

Here art and religious life meet in a sphere of consciousness where no such distinction exists. Therefore wherever religion is a living force there it finds its natural expression in art, in fact, it becomes art itself,—just as art in its highest attainments becomes religion. Art is the measure for the living quality of a religion.

The highest combination of art and religious life has been realized in past millenniums when Buddhist monks and mystics materialized their visions in sculptures and paintings, hymns and architecture, philosophy and poetry, and carried the message of a new civilisation all over Asia.

Unfortunately these lofty traditions have been almost completely forgotten, and nowadays the monk and the artist have nearly become antipodes. It should be the duty of the living, particularly the young generation, to create a new type of religious men, imbued with the Bodhisattva spirit which means not to turn one's back towards the world, but to penetrate it with the light of truth and harmony. The monk should not be a man who excludes himself from the world, but one who sacrifices himself to the world, one who renounces the life of a householder in order to make the universe his house, one who gives up family in order to make humanity his family; in short, renunciation should not be something negative or narrowing, but the giving up of the smaller for the sake of the greater, a breaking down of limitations in order to attain that supreme liberation which is the aim of all religions and of true art as well.

The contemplation of the Beautiful, according to the Buddha's own teaching, makes us free from all selfish concerns, it lifts us to a plane of perfect harmony and happiness, it creates a foretaste of ultimate liberation, thus encouraging us to strive on towards Realisation. Art as the manifestation of the Beautiful and the purity of vision is therefore the greatest creative power, able even to transform the world. It is just the imperfection of this our world which stimulates this creativeness, because "true beauty can be discovered only by one

who mentally completes the incomplete." Buddhists value art as Yoga, because "the dynamic nature of their philosophy laid more stress upon the process through which perfection was sought than upon perfection itself. . . . The virility of life and art lay in its possibilities of growth." It was in this spirit that schools of Buddhism arose which cultivated art not for the sake of its products but as a kind of creative meditation or Bhâvanâ (in its higher stages known as Dhyâna).

THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECT AND OBJECT

Our hands can only touch or 'grasp' things in our nearest surroundings. Likewise words can only 'grasp' or convey truths of a very limited value, namely those "which are of the nature of information, that can be added to our stock of knowledge from the outside. But there are other truths, of the nature of inspiration, which cannot be used to swell the number of our accomplishments. These latter are not like food, but are rather the appetite itself, that can only be strengthened by inducing harmony in our bodily functions." Tagore in this connection says that religion is such a truth, and we can add that art in the highest sense represents truth in the same measure. "It establishes the right centre for life's activities, giving them an eternal meaning; maintaining the true standard of value for the objects of our striving; inspires in us the spirit of renunciation which is the spirit of humanity. It cannot be doled out in regulated measure, nor administered through the academic machinery of education. It must come immediate from the burning flame of spiritual life."

To keep this flame burning we have to keep alive the spirit of inquiry, which means that we ought not to look upon any solution presented to our mind as final. We ought to use thinking in order to become conscious of the unthinkable, to keep our mind open to ever new experiences and to be aware of the enigmatic character

of the world and of our own existence. Then every thing will become significant, because we shall look upon every thing as if we had never seen it before under complete omission of all former mental associations, which we generally term 'knowledge'. The longer we can abstain from seeing things habitually the more profoundly we shall be conscious of their true nature, which goes beyond concepts and definitions. Habit kills intuition because it prevents living experience. Therefore thinking, after having grown to the point where the problems appear, must not become paralyzed by intellectual solutions or by storing up final results, but it should be transformed and generated into a dynamic mental attitude which develops problems to their last consequence where words fade away into paradoxes and a new language of symbols is born. Those who try to solve those paradoxes logically lose themselves in an inextricable labyrinth. But those who open themselves to the new language of forms, will find that even the most insignificant thing can become a revelation, and that in truth "the external world is nothing but the inner world in a state of mystery" (Novalis). To penetrate this mystery, man must give up himself, because only by this complete spiritual renunciation is broken down all his artificial limitations and inner hindrances.

In order to produce such a state of mind the Buddhists of the Far East invented special exercises of meditation ("Zen"—dhyâna) which mainly consist in the methodical concentration on so-called "Koans." The Koan is a problem in the form of a short,—mostly paradoxical—question or statement, which cannot be answered or explained in words, but stirs up the mind and baffles the intellect in such a way that the insufficiency

of reasoning becomes obvious and another way out has to be found. The pressure increases until by a sudden explosion thinker and thought are fused in a flash of profound insight (satori).

To illustrate the difference between this state of mind and the ordinary consciousness a Zen Master says: "When you have satori you are able to reveal a palatial mansion made of precious stones on a single blade of grass; but when you have no satori a palatial mansion itself is concealed behind a simple blade of grass."

In daily life our habitual concepts take the place of a blade of grass; they are hiding the living world from our mind. They are one-sided and partial though they may be 'true' to the ordinary intellect. A poet may give us a most exaggerated account of an event and may yet be nearer to truth than the most correct description of facts. Why is that so? Because he does not pretend to be 'objective', but takes the liberty of being entirely subjective. This unbiassed subjectivity is the privilege of the genius and the child—therefore we say that the child's tongue reveals the truth—is generally suppressed in the later stages of life by the judging, i.e., measuring, dividing (into pros and cons), disuniting intellect, and can be regained and appreciated only by the attainment of a higher level which goes beyond the opposites, and in which subject and object contain each other as exponents of one and the same reality.

The following little story may serve as an illustration: Two monks were taking a walk together. The one said: "Look how that flag is moving in the wind." The other one answered: "How can you say that the flag is moving? It is the wind that moves."

Eno, the sixth Buddhist Patriarch in China, who happened to overhear their discussion, said: "Neither the wind nor the flag is moving. Your mind moves!"

But Mummon, a Japanese Patriarch of the thirteenth century, not yet satisfied with this answer, went one step further and said: "Neither the wind, nor the flag, nor the mind is moving," thus alluding to the ultimate principle (suññatâ), in which there is neither going nor coming, comprising both the subjective and the objective aspect of reality.

But this reality is not to be separated or abstracted from its exponents, the momentariness not to be distinguished from eternity. The most perfect individual self-expression is the most objective description of the world. The greatest artist is he who expresses what is felt by everybody. But how does he do it? By being more subjective than others. Therefore Goethe could say: "The highest works of art are those which possess the highest truth, but no trace of ('objective') reality."

In the words of a modern thinker: "Objective knowledge does not study facts but *only the perception of facts*. Subjective knowledge studies the *facts*—the facts of consciousness—the only real facts. Thus objective knowledge has to do with the unreal, with the reflected, the imaginary world: subjective knowledge has to do with the real world." (P. D. Ouspensky).

The more the artist expresses himself the nearer he comes to the others, because our real nature is that of egolessness (anattâ) or unlimited relationship (suññatâ).

"Clear and unimpaired is the light of the spiritual mirror,
Boundless, penetrating the innumerable realms,

Which are as countless as the sands of the sea.
In its centre there is formed as a picture
The whole world.
It is a perfect light; it is unbroken;
It is neither merely inside nor outside."

Thus sings the Patriarch Enô's disciple Jôka in his hymn Shôdô-Ka, and in the same hymn we find the words: "The empty shape of transitory illusion is nothing but the shape of truth."

It is the secret of art that it reveals the supra-individual through individuality, the Not-Self through the Self, the object through the subject. Art in itself is a sort of a paradox, a *Koan* in the deepest sense of the word, and that is why the followers of Zen prefer it to all other mediums of expression. For only the paradox escapes the dilemma of logical limitation, of partiality and one-sidedness, it cannot be bound down to principles or conceptual definitions, because it exaggerates or abstracts intentionally in such a way that it is impossible to take it literally: its meaning is beyond the incongruity of the words.

ART AND SPIRITUAL TRAINING

"We know little or nothing of the great artists of Hindustan. But we know of those of China and Japan, their heirs, that they were all Yogis, that they saw the only path to art in Yoga. They did, of course, in their first student years, draw after nature with the most earnest perseverance, in order to become the complete masters of their means of expression; but they regarded this merely as a preliminary. For them the essential was the problem of absorption. They became absorbed in themselves or in a waterfall, or a landscape, a human face, according to what they wished to represent, until they had become one with their object, and then they created it from within, unconcerned by all outer forms. It is said of Li Lung-Mien, the master of the Sung Dynasty, that his main occupation did not consist in work but in meditating by the side of the mountain slopes, or near the brooks. Tao-tse was once asked by the Emperor to paint a certain landscape. He returned without sketches or studies and replied to surprised questioning: "I have brought nature back in my heart." Kuo-Hsi teaches, in his writings concerning landscape painting: "The artist must, above all, enter into spiritual relation with the hills and rivers which he wishes to paint." Inner collectedness seemed to these artists to be more important than external training. And, surely, the completely 'inward' individual stands above reason, for its laws live within his mind; he does not need to obey them any more, just as he who knows

is beyond good and evil. As his knowledge unconsciously controls all his activity, thus the knowledge of the artist-Yogi directs unfailingly even the most capricious delineation. The rhythm of Far Eastern drawing is not of rational origin: it is an inner rhythm, like that of music. If one compares the design of Leonardo or Dürer with it, one sees at once what the difference consists in: the one is the outcome of the concentration of reason which necessarily leads to the discovery of objective rules; the other is the product of pure self-realisation, pure subjectivity condensed into form. Thus the East has succeeded in what has never yet been reached by the West: the visible representation of the Divine as such. I know nothing more grand in this world than the figure of Buddha; it is an absolutely perfect embodiment of spirituality in the visible domain. And this is not owing to the expression of calm, of soulfulness, and inwardness which it bears, but it is due to the figure in itself, independent of all concurrence with the corresponding phenomena in nature." (Kaiserling).

Thus Buddhist meditation inspired the art of the Far East with new ideals, as it had done previously in the country of its origin. The execution of a work of art was regarded to be in itself an act of creative meditation, and the enjoyment of art became a part of the spiritual training, without which nobody could claim to be really cultured. "The followers of Zen aimed at direct communion with the inner nature of things, regarding their outward accessories only as impediments to a clear perception of Truth. It was this love of the Abstract that led the Zen to prefer black and white sketches to the elaborately coloured paintings of the classic Buddhist school." (O. Kakuzo) It was not

the subject of a work of art that decided its value but the impetus with which it had been created and which it reproduced in the beholder. But the faculty of responding to the inner meaning of such works of art has to be cultivated in the same measure as the faculty to express their meaning in visible forms. Just as the artist has to master the material in which he creates, so the one who wants to enjoy art has to prepare and to tune the instrument of spiritual receptivity.

This is what people of our times generally forget. They want to enjoy art without any effort on their part, without tuning their own instrument, without spending even the smallest time for training their mind. They expect resonance while being filled with a thousand other thoughts and the petty cares of their everyday-life; but resonance is not possible without emptiness (suññatâ therefore means a perfect state of resonance), without perfect purity of mind.

Most people want to get something valuable without paying its price. They want to understand, or even to judge, within a few moments what has taken an artist many years of study and concentration. Art is to them a kind of a stop-gap of their leisure hours, a more or less luxurious plaything whose value is measured by the momentary pleasure they can derive from it. And of all branches of art it is mainly painting and sculpture which are the victims of such superficial judgment. In both music and literature for instance a great amount of training (education) and knowledge is regarded to be necessary in order to appreciate its beauty or to judge its value. The reason for the fact that the formative arts are more exposed to superficial judgment is their similarity with the surface of our visible world. But this similarity which wrongly has

been taken as the essential part of these arts only serves to clothe the experience or the idea of the artist in visible or material forms which are familiar to us and thus provide an easier approach, comparable to the metaphor and similes in poetry. If one would take them at their face value one would miss the real meaning.

ABSTRACT ART

In order to escape the danger of losing the essential value of art by submitting it to the external forms of nature, the artist again and again has to break these forms and to extract their intrinsic value from them. He has to *abstract*, literally: to pull off the cloak of concrete phenomena and habitual associations which divert the attention and mislead the mind towards the surface, until they have become pure manifestations of his experience. This does not mean that the artist violates the forms by treating them arbitrarily. On the contrary, now forms are no more exponents of static things, which derive their meaning from realities outside of themselves (and of ourselves) but they become the embodiment of movement, which expresses their own nature as well as our feeling, because both *are* movement: in its least perceptible state, as on the physical plane, we call it extension, on the psychic plane feeling, or, if more intensified, emotion. The emotional quality is more connected with the more active, more 'aggressive', nature of colour (radiation) and sound (vibration). The perceptual side of feeling is more connected with two-and three-dimensional forms. They are nearer to the intellect because their perception demands clear spatial definition. Painting which contains equally formal and colour elements and even possibilities of plastic expression, combines both sides of human experience, the mental as well as the emotional side and is therefore specially fit for the development of abstract art.

It is important to be quite clear about the meaning of this term because there are people who think that abstract art is the allegorical representation of abstract concepts. Even in cases where such concepts endeavour to find a formulation of something that lies in the direction of what art tries to express, there is a fundamental difference of procedure and emphasis. Abstract concepts are attained by logical operations, following analytical and deductive methods by which they lose life and reality in the same measure in which the operation proceeds. Abstract art on the other hand proceeds in the inductive and constructive way by emphasizing and developing essential features by which all secondary factors are suppressed if not entirely eliminated, so that the life which was hidden under the surface becomes intensified and more real to our consciousness.

Thus the term 'abstract' is more related to the effect than to the process of artistic creation. It is not so much concerned with the attitude of the artist as with that of the beholder; because what he will notice first is the absence of those concrete or so-called natural forms to which he is accustomed. The more he tries to find parallels to them the less he will be able to grasp the spirit of abstract art. Because this art does not take the roundabout way through the objects of the external, optical world, but creates compositions of form and colour which in their totality reproduce a certain state of mind.

The nearest example, I can imagine, is music, because it is the least imitative or descriptive of all existing forms of art. Nobody would ever ask what a single tone means. Not even a melody could be explained or described by words. We only can say that such and such feelings were aroused by it.

It is the same matter with abstract painting. We cannot ask what a single colour or a single shape means. This one could only ask if they meant something different from what they are. On the other hand it would be wrong to conclude that they have no meaning: on the contrary, it is because of the profundity of their nature, the many-sidedness of their character that we cannot define them in any exclusive way. It is only the composition as a whole that gives a particular, though not explainable significance to them. Thus abstract paintings are just as 'real' as a landscape or the shape of a human being: they imitate nothing, nor do they depend on any idea which we give them, because they are complete in themselves, a cosmos in miniature. From the standpoint of art it is therefore not necessary to justify them by any particular 'idea'.

Just as the human face is the expression of a certain stage in the development of the individual, in the very same way an abstract picture represents a certain mental or emotional state in the development of an artist. After some time when he looks back on his work he may be able to understand its meaning and the state of mind from which it arose, but during the time of its creation his work is too much part of himself for him to see it objectively. And even if he could he would not be able to explain it, as little as one is able to explain one's own face though one may look at it in the mirror. If a painting could be explained or described adequately by some other medium, it would not be necessary to express it through colour and form. Words can only describe in what direction a certain experience lies and how we have to approach it. "Words are only like the pointing finger showing one where to locate the moon", as a Buddhist Patriarch once said. But we must not look at the finger if we want to see the moon.

Second Part

EXPERIENCES OF MEDITATION AND THEIR EXPRESSION IN PAINTING AND POETRY

INTROSPECTION

He who looks backward
is stricken by death,

He who looks forward
is stricken by birth,

He who looks inward
cannot be stricken,

Thus invincible
he becomes complete.

INTRODUCTION

TO

A COSMIC MEDITATION

(1) The Fundamental Forms of our World

The visible world appears to us in an inexhaustible variety and multitude of forms and colours. And yet this our world is confined to three essential forms and three essential colours. With even the greatest phantasy we cannot imagine more than these six elements of formal representation. This fact is an important indication as to the structure of the universe in which we live. Once we are conscious of it, we begin to feel that these fundamental forms are the key to the understanding of our three-dimensional world and the nature of our own mind.

The question whether or not these forms are essential to the universe as such is of no importance to us, as we have no means to answer it. But it is certain that these forms have their definite place in the order of the universe and express a certain aspect of its reality, which corresponds to our state of existence, i.e., to our plane of consciousness. The possibility of higher dimensions does not make lower ones less real or less important. A consciousness bound to the third dimension may not be able to experience the next higher one, but it doubtlessly has the faculty to be aware of the first and second dimension.

The three essential forms are:—the cube, the cylinder, and the sphere.

The cube and the sphere represent the two extremes: the former one is composed of plane surfaces, the latter one of a surface which is curved equally towards all directions.

The cylinder takes the middle place as the mediator between the completely plane and the completely curved surface, being neither the one nor the other but possessing properties of both: it is curved in one direction and straight in another direction (namely parallel to its axis).

If we relate these three stereometrical forms to the plane we shall find the following facts: the sphere touches a plane in a *point*, the cylinder in a (straight) *line*, the cube in a *surface*. This means from the standpoint of movability that the sphere can move (roll) in *all* directions, the cylinder in *one* direction, the cube in *no* direction.

Each of these fundamental forms can be projected to a point. In this way from the cube develops the *pyramid*, from the cylinder the *cone*, and from the sphere the *spheric cone*. Each of these secondary forms expresses the qualities of the forms from which it originated plus the qualities of directedness and one-pointedness. There is something more definite, more aggressive (direction), more positive in these pointed forms. The relationship between cube and pyramid, cylinder and cone, sphere and spheric cone, is like that between female and male respectively.

In this sense we may call pyramid, cone, and spheric cone active forms in contradistinction to their (female) passive counterparts (from which they were born). But we have to bear in mind that the terms

'active' and 'passive' can only be used in a very relative sense, because passivity as a characteristic of the female attitude does not exclude activity within the peculiar realm of female properties.

Female activity is activity by way of multiplication or addition, while male activity is activity by way of intensification or direction.

On the other hand, activity as a male property does not exclude passivity. But while female passivity is a positive attitude, namely that of receptivity, latent creativeness or potentiality, male passivity is merely an absence or a lesser degree of action, and therefore negative.

In the more developed forms of organic life male and female properties exist simultaneously in each individual, though the one or the other group takes the lead and determines the sex. The higher the state of development the greater is the interpenetration of male and female properties. The greatest artists are able to express the psyche of man and woman equally perfect, which means that they are able to experience the male and the female within themselves. The saint is he who has polarized the male and the female within himself to perfect harmony.

Likewise we have to understand that each form potentially contains the others; in other words, that each form represents a particular state of cosmic reality. This is what I have tried to express in my three "cosmic abstracts."

The first one represents the urge towards creation or material existence, the craving for form, the first stage of materialisation. I have therefore called it "BECOMING" or "BRAHMA, THE CREATOR."

Cubic and pyramidal forms crystallize out of each

other. In the foreground a cube is to be seen which contains a sphere as a germ; in the upper left corner the background opens and allows a view into the next stage of formal development, indicated by a cone. The colours of the cubic forms are different shades of green, those of the pyramids various shades of red. The sphere is deep violet and the cone orange against light blue.

Orange and blue are the governing colours of the next picture. Only the cubic forms in the foreground, a reminiscence of the first composition, are in green and red hues. With the exception of these forms the picture is composed of bodies with curved surfaces: blue cylinders, most of them ending in orange-coloured cones. Warm yellow reflexes vibrate in the blue, while the orange deepens into blue shadings. The centralizing tendency in the cones culminates in the background in which dark blue cylindric columns meet in a central sphere. The middle column, which is about twice as thick as the others, emphasizes the axis.

Thus the picture grows from an unrestrained form-desire into the centralisation and stabilisation of a law, which regulates the growth, the composition, and the relationship of forms. I therefore call this picture and the psycho-cosmic state which is expressed by it: "BEING", or "VISHNU, THE LAW."

It occurred to me, long after I had painted these meditation pictures, that Vishnu according to Hindu tradition is represented in blue colour (as also Krishna and Rama, his most prominent Avatars) and that the conical Shikara-towers are mainly associated with Vishnu-temples (which originated in the north of India) while the hemispheric cupola is mainly associated with the Shiva temples (prevailing in the south). In the case of

Brahma the square shape is emphasized by the four entrances to his temple, his four heads, and his four-sided pillar. His colour is red, because he is originally the fire-god.

Vishnu is the preserver of the world, the world-preserving Law, the cosmic order, the unifying and directing principle in a world of diversity, the centre of life, the illuminator, the sun-god. In his last-mentioned capacity orange, as the colour of the sun, and gold, the sun-metal, belong to his symbols. The Law is the resting axis around which the world revolves. The cylindric form represents the ideal axis, in fact, an infinite axis (as the cylinder by its own nature has no beginning and no end) and as such stability. It also takes, as we have seen, the central and mediating place between the bodies with completely plane surface and those with completely curved surface (i.e., curved towards all sides).

The dark violet sphere in the upper centre of our composition points towards the third stage in the development of forms, which is shown in the third picture.

In the foreground we find again the reminiscences of the previous stages in their characteristic colours. But the main subject are the spheric forms which finally swing out into a rhythmic movement in which form and space interpenetrate and create each other. It is the transformation of form into rhythm, and of movement into space. It represents the disintegration and liberation of matter into energy, the liberation of form into the unformed, the overcoming of stagnation by breaking down the limits, the victory of life through death. I therefore call this picture "DISSOLUTION", or "SHIVA, THE TRANSFORMER".

He is the Lord of Dance, who destroys the world in his ecstatic dance,—a destruction which is not negative, but which removes the hindrances of accumulated form and matter, of stagnating Karma, of frozen law, of principles which have overgrown life (so to say 'principles for their own sake'), of coagulation, of torpor. He is the destroyer of the world of illusion, uniting in himself asceticism and ecstasy, concentration and activity.

The profound connection between the idea of transformation and the sphere becomes also apparent by the symbolism of the Buddhist Stûpa, in which the hemisphere has been made the monument of the greatest spiritual transformation by the complete destruction of all the above-named hindrances, the monument of parinirvâna. Its origins go back to the pre-historic cult of the dead and it survives in the domes of Shiva-temples.

The characteristic colours of this composition are the dark violet of the spheres and the oscillating greenish yellow of the spheric cones emanating from them.

(2) Relations between Three-Dimensional Forms and Colours

We have to say a few words more about the colours in their relationship to the fundamental three-dimensional forms.

Is the choice of colours in these compositions merely an outcome of subjective taste or does a definite relationship exist between forms and colours?

If we consider the fact that the universe,—as it is reflected in our human consciousness,—is composed of three fundamental forms and three fundamental colours, and that the forms as well as the colours develop into pairs of opposites which condition and compensate each other like the positive and the negative pole of a magnet, or like the active and passive properties of the male and female,—then it is hard to believe that this parallelism is a mere accident. I for my part am convinced that both express the structure of our three-dimensional world by which they are conditioned, that they represent the same harmony in different dimensions and that therefore there *is* a definite relation between colours and forms. This relationship may be expressed in different ways, according to the standpoint of the individual, but this only changes the key-note but not the melody. Even a different rhythm, according to the individual temperament and experience, would not destroy that melody.

Before speaking of my own experience I may be allowed to remind the reader of a few facts.

The three fundamental colours, from which all other colours can be developed (but which themselves cannot be reduced any more) are: *blue*, *red*, and *yellow*.

To each of these colours a complementary colour can be found as the product of a combination of the remaining two fundamental colours. Thus the combination of red and yellow produces the complementary colour of blue, i.e., *orange*. The combination of blue and red forms the complementary colour of yellow, i.e., *violet*. The combination of yellow and blue forms the complementary colour of red, i.e., *green*.

If the primary colour is active, then the complementary colour is passive. Active colours are red, yellow, and orange, while green, violet, and blue are passive colours. There are sufficient physiological and psychological reasons for this division which we need not to repeat here, as everybody with a normal feeling for colours is able to see for himself.

But there are many different kinds and degrees of activity and passivity which can be experienced by those who are sensitive to colours, though one may find an intellectual approach also by means of comparisons and associations or obvious reasons.

If we compare the activity of the two fundamental-active colours red and yellow we find the same difference as between fire and light, between material and immaterial, or between physical and spiritual activity. The activity of fire is felt more intensely and bodily[1], the activity of light is that of radiation, comparable to the activity of consciousness.

[1] It is interesting to note that red is the colour which mainly acts upon animals and the first colour that interests the awakening colour-sense of children and primitive man.

Orange, which unites red and yellow, combines both these qualities: warmth and light; in the human sphere: feeling and knowledge, the highest form of psychic activity which we associate with the saint. This colour therefore is used to characterize the saint or to represent his aura. It is likewise the colour of the sun and of gold, both symbols of highest power and value.

Its complementary colour is blue, the only fundamental-passive colour, the deepest, purest, and quietest colour, the colour of space and infinity, the source and the all-embracing unity (therefore the colour of Vishnu), the undifferentiated, the potential ground of the universe. The passivity of blue is of a very positive nature, a cosmic quality, and not to be confounded with the vegetative passivity of green which is the opposite pole to red.

Red and green are colours of bodily nearness, of animal and vegetative life. From the cosmic point of view they represent physical forces.

The third passive colour, violet, is perhaps the most difficult because the most complicated and protean colour (it shares this protean character with the sphere). It combines the most intensely active (red) with the most quiet and passive colour (blue). It contains an enormous inner tension, a tendency of transformation (Shiva) even of dissolution, of inner movement and struggle. It is typical that this colour is the latest to appear in art. It was unknown to primitive humanity and not even used by the early Greeks. In Christian symbolism it is the colour of spiritual suffering, of Passion.

The sphere, resting completely in itself (blue) and at the same time having the greatest possibility of movement or action (red) is therefore as a body in a

similar position like violet among the colours. And consequently the spheric cone, as the active counterpart, takes the position of the active complementary colour of violet, viz., yellow.

The cylinder in its capacity of a virtually infinite axis of stability in the sense of a unifying cosmic law corresponds to the stability and restful unity of blue. The mediating position of the cylinder between the two other principles of form emphasizes its central and unity-creating character which takes its active shape in the cone, to which orange, the active complementary colour of blue corresponds.

The physical activity of the pyramid corresponds to the physical activity of red, while the inertness, resistance of the cube, in which movement is only thinkable as extension, is related to the physical passivity of green.

It goes without saying that the parallelism between forms and colours, which I felt in this "cosmic meditation" and for which I have tried to find a logical approach that might help others to understand my experience, does not exhaust the relations between forms and colours.

COSMIC MEDITATION

I

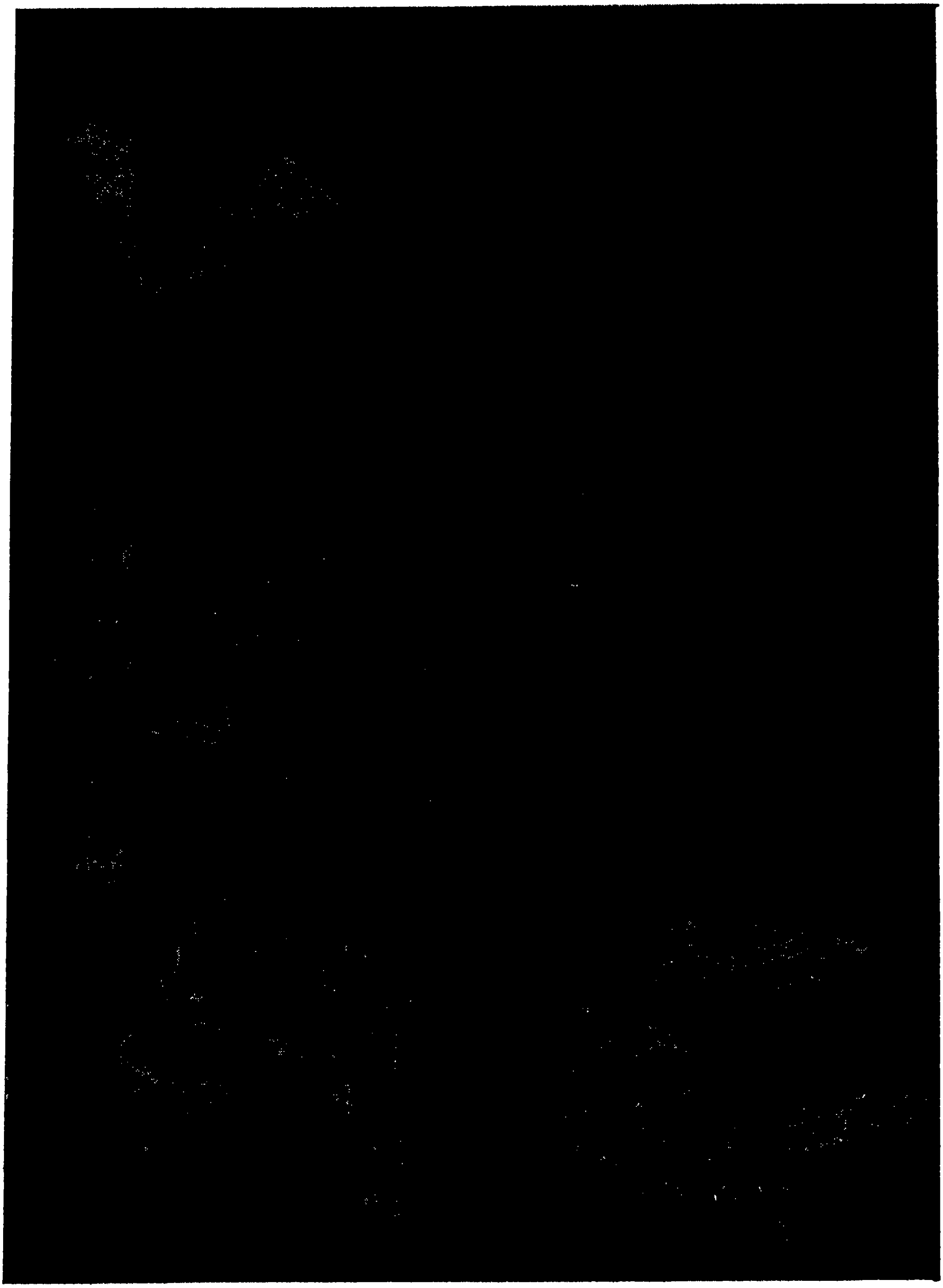
BECOMING

(Brahma: the Creator)

Breakers roar in rocky clefts,
Mountains of water roll against the cliffs,
Form follows form, craving to be,
And swallowing each other, merciless.

Will towards form, urging into existence,
Vibrates in crystals, and piles rock on rock.
It makes the mountains grow into the sky,
And on their crumbling dust the jungles rise.

Life's thirst creates the beings' form,
Ceaselessly longing, growing, pressing on:
An ecstasy of joy and pain, bursting into existence
And thundering in vain against the adamantine
mountains of eternity.



I BECOMING

III

DISSOLUTION

(Shiva: the Transformer)

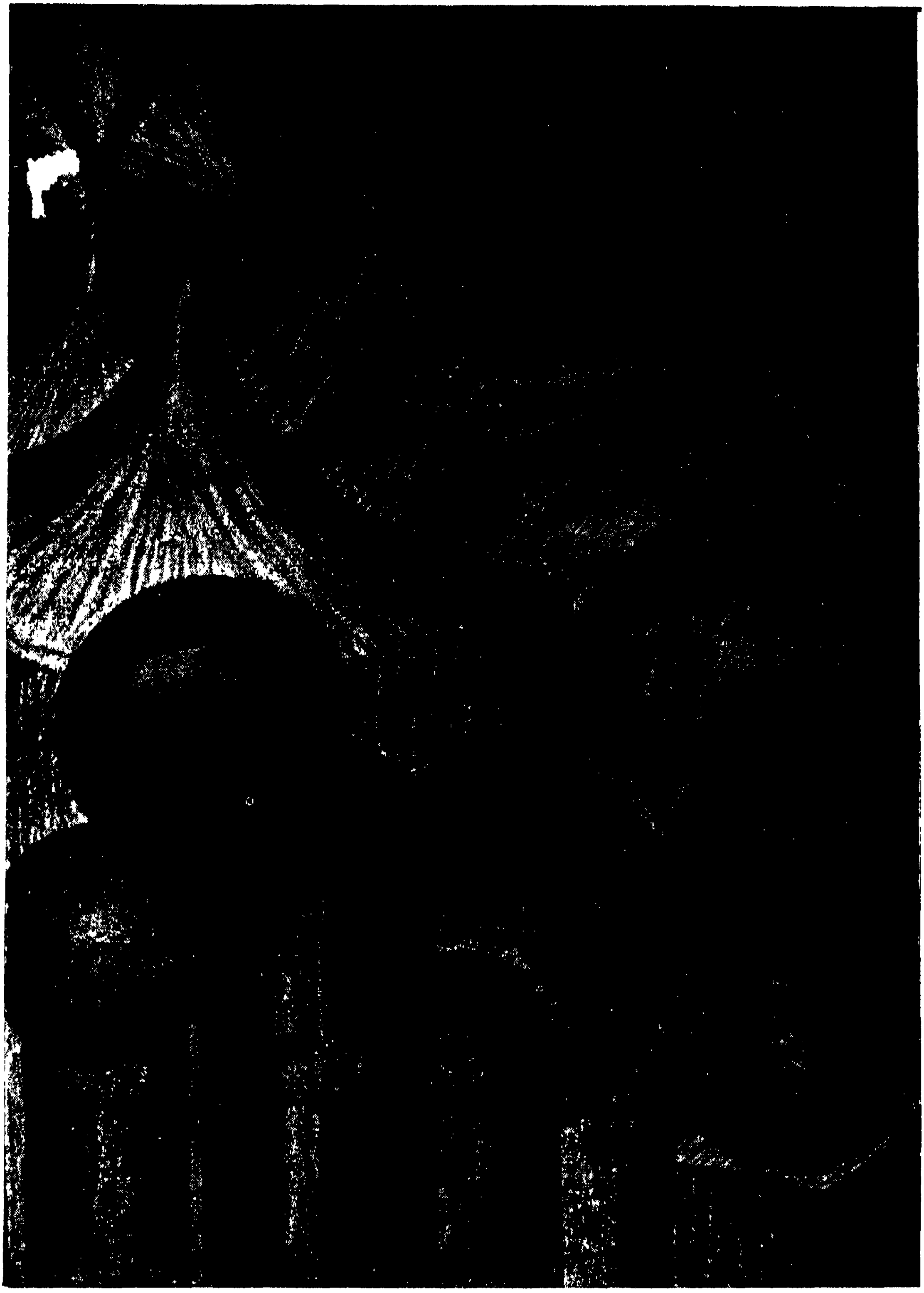
Shiva!

Thou storming destroyer of the world!
Thou transforming transformer!
Thou who giveth and taketh within one breath:

Release me from myself!
Dissolve the form into freedom
Undo this life earth-rooted,
Undo this life of craving,
Undo this life of clinging!

Deliver me from the death of stagnation
to the storm of life:
The storm that uproots all craving,
The storm that pulls down all clinging,
The storm that breaks down what resists!

Deliver me from a life that negates death,
O thou eternal transformer,
Thou dancing liberator of the universe!



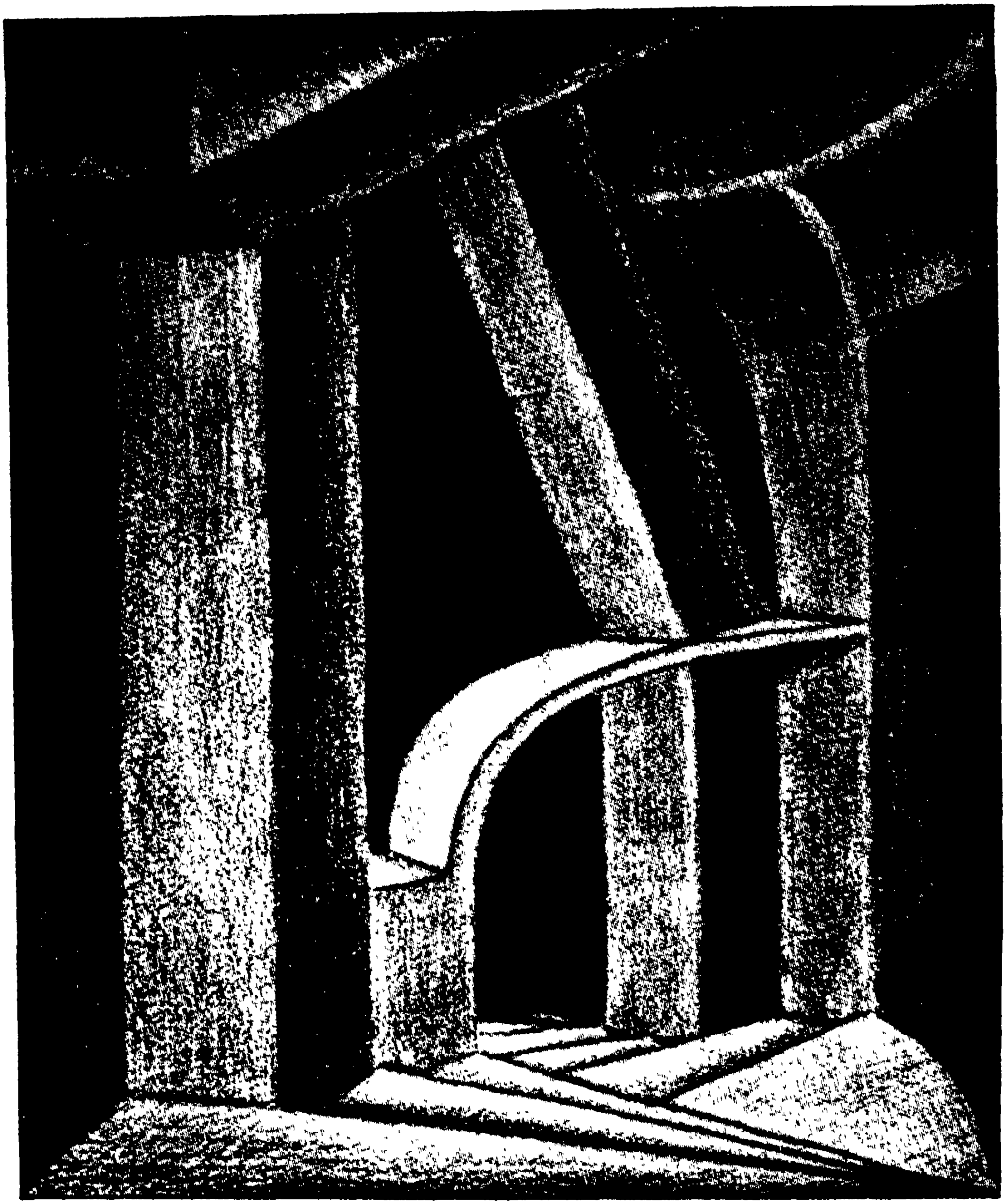
III DISSOLVING

ECSTATIC MEDITATION

I
LABYRINTH

Woe to him,
    who enters the temple of knowledge
Without being free
    from the fetters of desire !
For, what appeared before
    a joyful, easy play
Grows here as heavy
    as a mountain's weight,
Grows into labyrinthian walls
Within which hopelessly
    he errs about,
While empty echoes
    ape his voice,
Scoffingly throwing back
    his fearful questions.

In the deepest depth of our being
    is the temple's portal,
And if we pass through it
    for the first time,
Seeing the world and our face reflected
    in thousandfold and everchanging forms,
Then falls on us a dumb and dreamlike fear—
    the fear of being chained
For ever to this chaos.



I LABYRINTH

II

BREAKING THROUGH

But are we chained ?—
No—truly, we are not !
Our own chains bind us
    to this world of things !
We clutch and cling,
    to forms and vain illusions,
Like one who sinking down
    clings to a plank,
Which itself blindly drifts
    into a whirlpool.

But if this knowledge dawns,
The darkness is dispelled,
The first wall crumbles down.



II BREAKING THROUGH

III

LIBERATION

The chains are broken,
walls are reduced to dust.
The chaos becomes cosmos,
night turns to day.
Limits expand
into infinity
Flashes of light
flame through unbounded space.

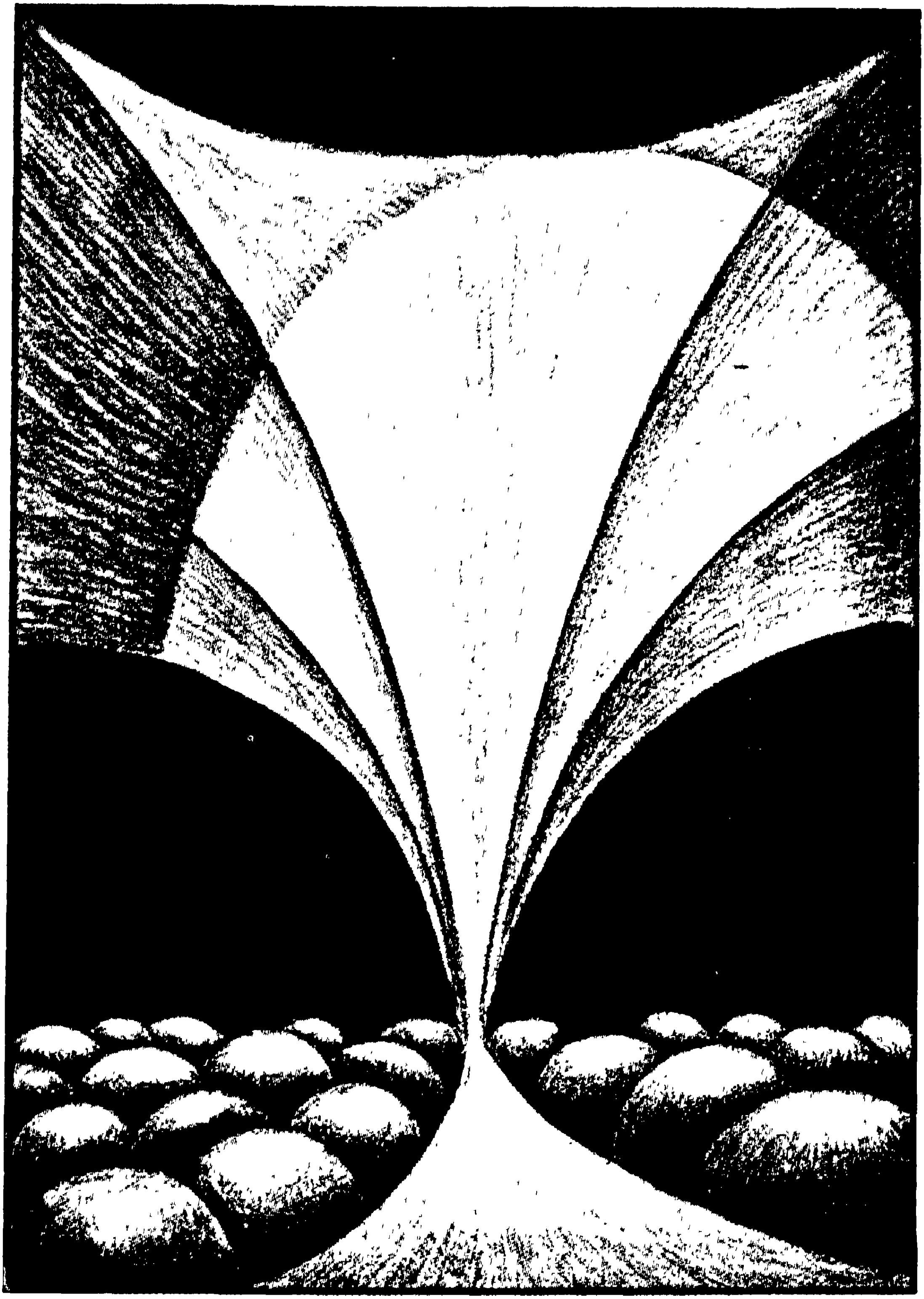
But undisturbed
by cosmic revolutions,
Embracing light and shadow,
day and night,
Nor fearing chaos,
nor desiring cosmos,
The liberated dwells within himself
— complete.

COLOUR HINTS

The colours of "the Labyrinth" are heavy and earth-bound: dark greens, browns, brown-violet, olive green. Only the semi-arch-like shape in the centre stands out with a deep red hue against a black background. The tension which here becomes visible in form and colour, indicates the will for expansion, for bursting open the oppressive walls and the desire to break through the uncertainty of darkness that looms in the background. It is like an outcry in the gloom of night.

In the second composition ("Breaking Through") the colours of the foreground and of the cubes in the middle-ground remind of those of the previous picture. They are less sombre, due to the light that floods in from outside. Through the triangular opening of the bursting walls appear spheric shapes of transparent blue and violet hues against a sky filled with yellow light.

In the third picture ("Liberation") all cubic forms and earth-bound colours have disappeared. Radiations of orange and yellow light swing into dark-blue space. The spheric forms oscillate in many colours of light, transparent quality (blue, blue-violet, red-violet, red).



III LIBERATION

CONCENTRIC MEDITATION

FOUR STAGES OF INTERNALISATION OR SAMADHI

I

RETIREMENT

In the first stage of absorption the quietness within oneself comes to be like a cool and peaceful space, isolating and protecting one from the burning restlessness of the outer world, from which one has just retired and which is seen or felt like the distant glow of a fire, shining through a narrow opening. Thinking and reflecting have not yet ceased. Reminiscences of the sense-world still vibrate in them and agitate the ground from which the space expands in an upward movement, like a flower that grows up and unfolds its petals at the same time towards all sides. In the picture this movement appears as transparent blue columns unfolding themselves into the vault which disappears in dark-blue shadows.

The more the outer world ceases to exist the wider grow the space and calmness within.



RETIREMENT

II

UNIFICATION

The gate of the senses is closed. The last reflexes of the outer world have vanished.

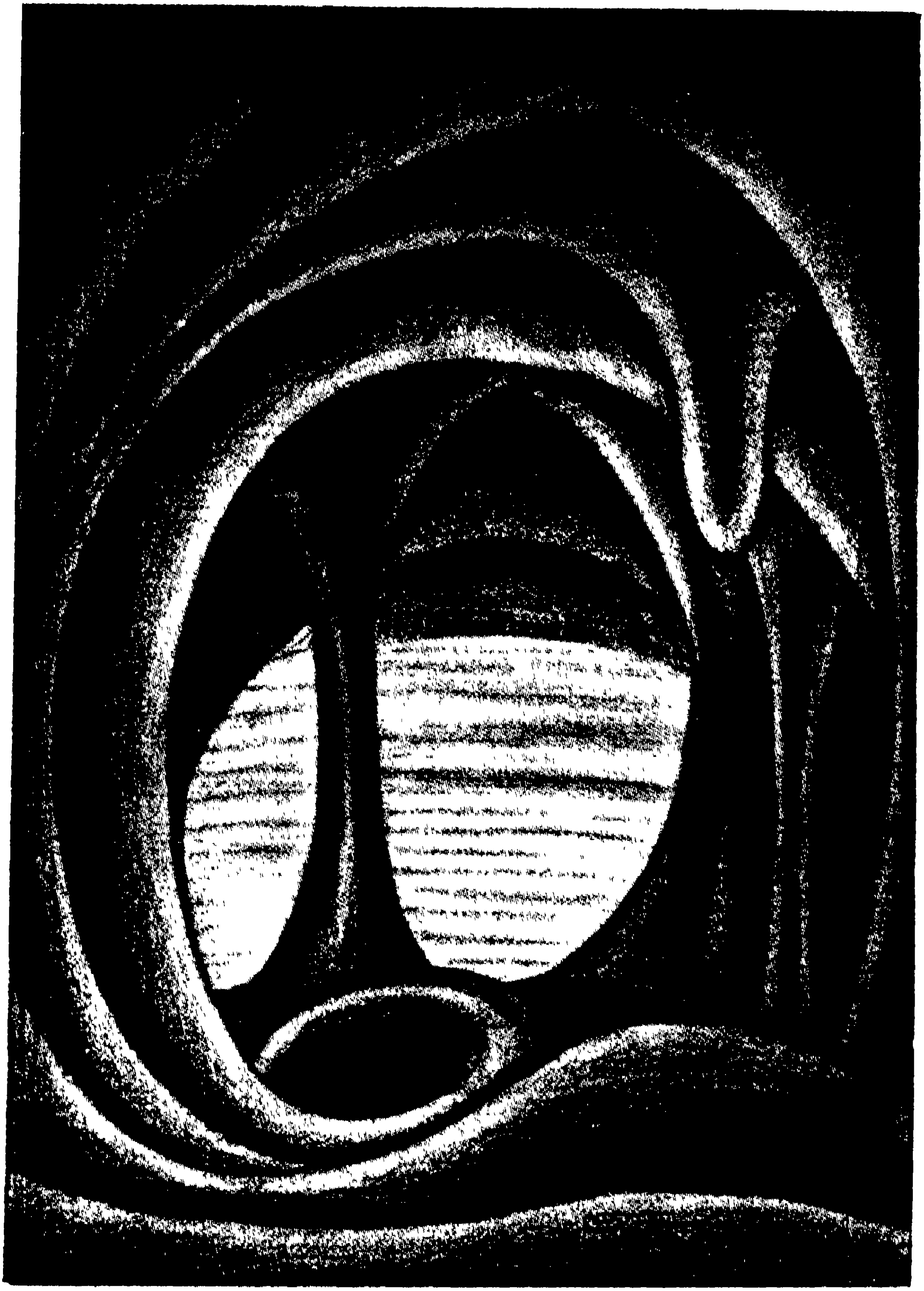
But a new radiance goes through the space, making its changing boundaries transparent and resplendent, as if woven of light.

The ground has become calm and translucent like the surface of the sea, and through it emanates the light that fills and enlivens everything.

The upward movement has changed into a concentric one, thus uniting the ground with the vault.

The Buddha, the Perfect Enlightened One, calls this state of absorption:

THE CALMNESS OF THE INNER SEA



II UNIFICATION

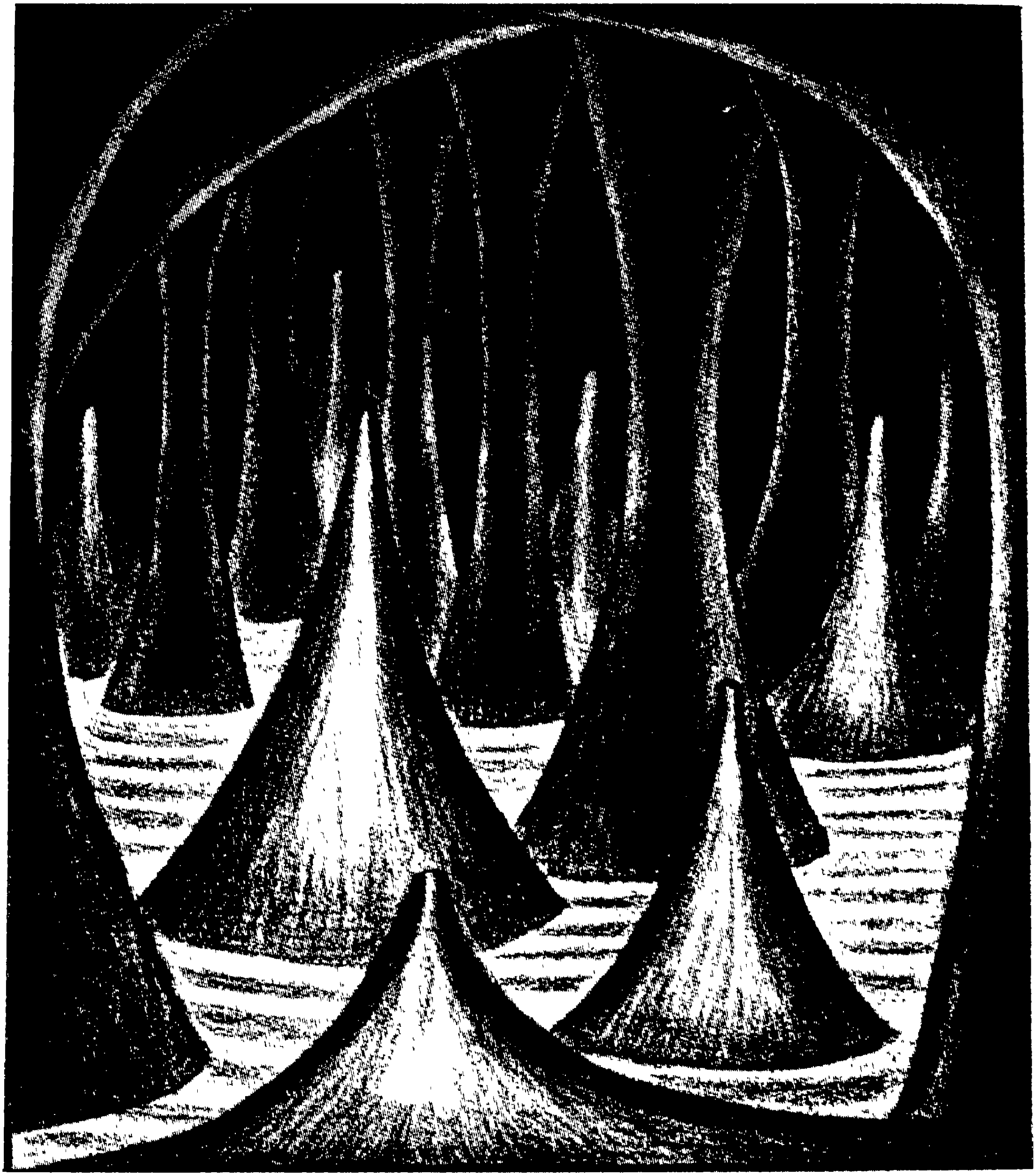
III

BIRTH OF HAPPINESS

Out of the "calmness of the inner sea" there grows a sublime feeling of happiness, different from, and more distinct and active than the happiness of the former stages.

This happiness gives a new impetus to the meditator to strive for a higher harmony.

The upward movement, which (again) breaks through the surface of the pacified ground, is the characteristic feature of this third stage of absorption.



III BIRTH OF HAPPINESS

IV

HARMONY

(Samadhi)

The overflowing happiness, which ran like a current through body and mind, stirring up all energies to a final effort, has now subsided and merged into a serenity which fills the depth with transparent gold.

The last vibrations swing out in concentric waves into the infinite, like the final cords of a sublime symphony.

Sound dies away,
silence becomes music,
light radiates,
the shadows disappear.

The leading colour of these four compositions is dark blue, from which the different forms stand out in various shades of light-blue, sometimes opalescent towards green-blue or violet-blue.

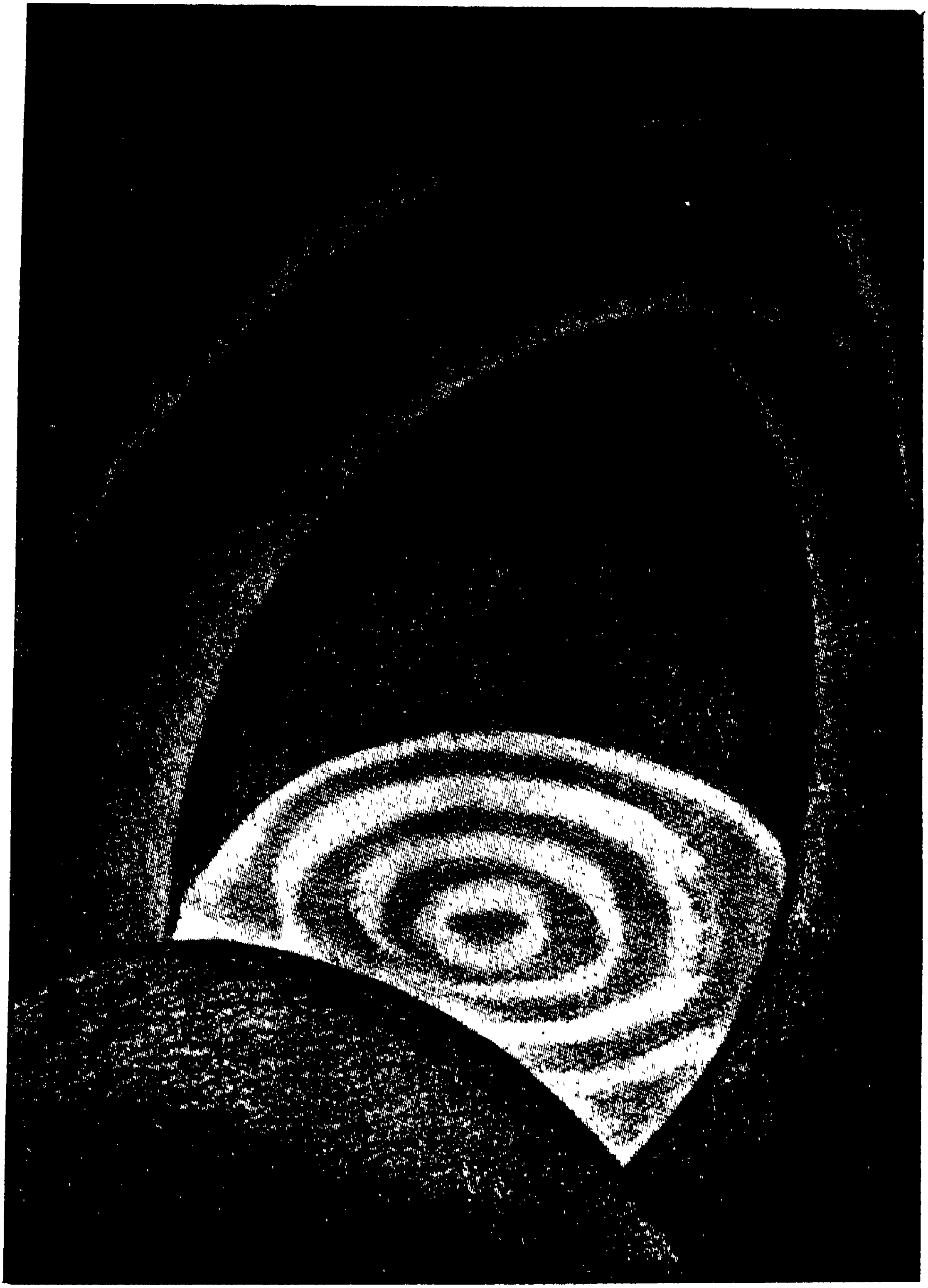
• The *first composition* is characterized by the red flames in the background and their reflexes on the wave-like forms in the foreground, which oscillate from dark-green into red-violet.

The background is dark-blue, the columns are transparent blue.

In the *second composition* there is neither red nor violet but a tendency towards more peaceful green-blues and green-yellow; the latter one in form of a subdued radiation in the background.

The *third composition* contains again violet, as in the blue-violet columns which rise from a transparent blue ground. The cones which are sprouting up through this ground between the columns, are shaded from the darkest to the lightest blue, interwoven by green and ending in greenish golden tips which emphasize the active character of the composition.

In the *fourth composition* the transparent greenish golden colour in the centre dominates. It is surrounded by dark blues, which are lighted up in the projecting forms in which the brightness of the centre is reflected.



IV SAMADHI

MEDITATIONS ON NATURE

MOUNT MERU

"Our intellect grasps this ultimate truth about things slowly, laboriously, and piecemeal. It sees but one thing at a time and so always brings a feeling of incompleteness and limitation. But we have occasional moments of insight when something presented to our sense or imagination will, from its own character or from some exalted mood of our own, seem like a perfect and perfectly comprehended universe in miniature.

And that is beauty.

When we hear a great symphony or watch a mountain sunrise or a great tragedy we have an experience analogous on a small scale to what we suppose an intellect infinitely superior to ours might have in understanding the universe, which to our partial apprehension has so many imperfections and dark spaces and ragged edges." (E. F. Carritt).

Before the cave in which I often used to meditate rose a lonely rock. At its foot, on a softly rounded hill, grew a tree whose branches stretched out from a gracefully bent stem in rhythmic curves, like the arms of a dancing Shiva. The immovable serenity of the rock, which like a pillar of crystal formed the centre of the mountain landscape before me, was strangely contrasted with the joyously dancing tree.

Innumerable times I had seen this strange group, and I had inwardly felt the peculiar charm which emanated from it, like from a beautiful hieroglyph or a Chinese ideogram, in which the hidden significance and the abstract harmony of lines exercise an inexplainable attraction. But one day the veil was lifted from my eyes, and I was able to read the hieroglyph,—at least one of its many meanings.

I had rediscovered a vision of India's soul—which in that moment was my own—the vision of *Mount Meru* with the magic World Tree, forming the centre of the universe in which the polar forces of stability and movement, that build and sustain the world, are united in their most concentrated and essential aspects.

The pillar-shaped crystal embodies the static qualities of inorganic forms, the static character of the world-axis or centre of gravitation (towards which everything is directed by way of inner relatedness). The magic tree, in Indian mythology called the Kalpatara or Wishgranting Tree, is the embodiment of the dynamic qualities of organic life.

In the microcosmos of the human body the spinal column corresponds to Mount Meru and is therefore called Meru-danda. The Tree of Life unfolds itself in the spiritual qualities of man, by which the highest wishes will be fulfilled: enlightenment and liberation. Thus the spiritual rebirth of the world starts in the mind of man, and the Tree of Life grows out of his own heart, the centre of his being, the axis of his world. And while he experiences the different world-planes, the Tree of Life sprouts and develops within him and spreads its branches in ever new infinities; in fact, he himself turns into a Tree of Life, into a Tree of Enlightenment.

Angelus Silesius, a Western mystic of the XVIIth century, without knowing anything of Indian mythology, used the picture of the tree as a symbol of higher life in a similar way:

"Shall the Life Tree
    free thee from death and strife,
Thyself must turn divine
    a Tree of Life."

While the colours of the crystal rock are more or less cold and transparent blues, the hemisphere out of which the tree grows, appears in a warm dark-violet hue.

The movement of the tree, which by its shape already emphasizes its dynamic and organic character, is balanced by a warm dark-blue, which renders it more serene and self-contained.

The colour as well as the shape of the hemisphere indicate potential forces of organic life, comparable to the seed or the egg in which latent creative powers are condensed into the smallest unit.

The background repeats the colours of the central forms in lighter shades. The sky is Veronese green.



MOUNT MERU

DYNAMIC COMPOSITION

In the judgment of three-dimensional forms we have to discern between the immanent character of pure stereometrical bodies and between such bodies in relationship to each other or to a limited space. They have furthermore a different meaning if seen from the standpoint of cosmic states or form-principles or in relationship to movement and life-forms. The more intricate their combination the greater is the ambiguity of their expression. Their different meanings and psychological qualities do not only depend on the composition but just as much on their colour.

The relations between forms and colours get their significance by their inborn parallelism and certain laws of proportion. But it is not so that one colour corresponds to one form exclusively and permanently. Each form and each colour has many qualities, and it depends on the combination (which determines the "standpoint") which quality comes to the foreground. Thus there is ample space for the artist to express his individual experience. But once he has chosen his key-note, he is bound to certain rules and laws of expression which he has to follow either consciously or instinctively if he wants to fill his work with life and inner truth.

We have to make a difference between paintings and coloured designs, between "painting" and "colouring." In a painting the colours are as important as the forms, if not more important; in the second case the

colour is merely accidental, an additional but not an essential value.

Even in nature we find such differences. There are landscapes in which colour seems to be accidental and others in which the colour expresses the essential qualities of the forms. In the latter case the landscape has an inspiring and artistic effect. In the first case the landscape may be beautiful, but if painted in a naturalistic way (as a copy of nature) it will nevertheless not represent the soul of the landscape. And here the artist, if he is not willing to produce a superficial copy of nature (namely its accidental part) has the choice either to put his own soul into the picture or the soul of the landscape, which in that case must correspond to some extent to his own. In both cases the colours of the picture will not correspond to the optical surface-colours of the landscape but either to a personal mood or to the essential character of the landscape. If in the first case we should speak of a subjective painting, we could call the second case objective with more reason than a naturalistic painting, because the artist does more justice to the real nature of the object before him.

The previous picture (Mount Meru) has provided us with an example how nature can be instrumental in creating a composition which expresses both, the character of a certain objectively existing landscape and a subjective vision of cosmological nature.

The following abstract may serve as an example of pure nature experience and its direct expression. It shows the dynamic character of a mountain landscape in which the structure of rocks exposes the struggle between the upwards pressing forces of nature and the resistance of solid matter. The tension which is thus created starts in the zigzag lines in the centre of the

composition and culminates in the arch between the two upwards rising rock-towers, the main exponents of movement.

The dynamic nature of these forms becomes still more obvious through the active colours, among which red dominates. The rock-towers rise like pillars of fire into an orange sky. Only in the deep shadows of the foreground a subdued green acts as a counterweight, as an element of resistance.

A great deal more could be said about colours and composition, but here, like in the previous abstracts, I think it wiser to leave room for the phantasy of the beholder, especially as a correct, detailed description is impossible and would only give opportunity to misunderstandings.



DYNAMIC COMPOSITION

CONCLUSION

I have told the reader, as far as possible, what I have experienced in painting these pictures and what I think about colours and forms.

Now he should put his own feelings and experiences into them. It may be that they are of a similar nature,—it may be that they are quite different, or that he merely enjoys the aesthetic qualities of these compositions. It does not matter,—if only his interest in the problems of art is deepened and the spirit of enquiry is aroused in him.

As these pictures are the outcome of meditations, so they may serve others as 'meditation problems,' as *koans*. If they lead to new visions, then they have fulfilled their mission, and like a piece of brick that is thrown away after it has been used to knock at the door, so the *koan* may be forgotten when the gates of the mind are opened.

APPENDIX

TO THE

"COSMIC MEDITATION"

The main features of the principle of Brahma are those of extension, unfoldment, birth, manifestation, materialisation, universal expansion. But this expansive character is not determined by one direction, like the Vishnu principle, but acts in all directions. Its stereometrical equivalent is the cube.

Just as in Hindu religion Brahma is supposed to be inherent in the aspects of Shiva and Vishnu, so the principle of Brahma, of materialisation, is immanent in the other two principles, in so far as they take material shape, as they come into appearance and unfold themselves.

The Buddhist starts from the experience of the world of sense perceptions and frees himself from its overpowering diversity and its unsatiable thirst of becoming by analysing its elements and reducing them to their fundamental laws. He thus overcomes the Brahma-aspect of the world by the Vishnu-aspect of the Law ('dharma' in its noumenal character, 'karma' in its phenomenal appearance, in its relationship to action).

With progressive understanding, however, the personality of the truth seeker loses the narrowness from which he suffered, the narrowness of particularity. He becomes the embodiment of the ineluctable law, of the living and yet so rigid procedure of the world.

And so the new aim presents itself, not only as freedom from the limitations of personality and the impulses that form and maintain it, but equally as freedom from the law of the world, which after all is the world itself; for the world does not possess this law as something additional, but consists in this conformity to law, i.e. in action and reaction. (Karma=Law=Cosmos=World)

Therewith is taken the last step from the principle of Vishnu to the principle of Shiva: the deliverance from the Become, the Formed, to the Un-Become, the Unformed: the ultimate transition from Law to Freedom.

While the first stage seeks freedom *in* the Cosmos, the deliverance from Becoming into Being; from the undirected, indiscriminate thirst for existence, the Chaos, to the consciously directed existence, the last stage seeks freedom *from* the Cosmos. (The term 'Cosmos,' as I use it here, denotes the experience of the world under the aspect of the Law.)

But in order to be freed from the Cosmos—the ultimate object of suffering in the stage of the highest, most refined consciousness—one must be capable of experiencing it, must really experience it. One must first have wrestled one's way to freedom *in* the Law before one can attain to freedom *from* the Law, that is to Freedom final and complete.

(Cfr. my lectures on "Stûpa Symbolism," delivered at Tagore's University, "Visvabharati," and published by the International Buddhist University Association, Sarnath, Benares).